

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

March 17, 2021

1:01 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stedman called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:01 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Click Bishop, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Donny Olson
Senator Natasha von Imhof
Senator Bill Wielechowski (via teleconference)
Senator David Wilson (via teleconference)

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Cris Eichenlaub, Self, Wasilla; Mary Jo Torgeson, Alaska Library Association and Alaska Library Network, Anchorage; Philip Licht, Set Free Alaska, Wasilla; Shannon Davenport, Alaska Nursing Association, Anchorage; Michelle Reiman, Set Free Alaska, Wasilla; Jenni Pollard, Thread, Anchorage; Suzy Pearson, Executive Director, Abused Women Aid Crisis, Anchorage; Gregory Heath, Self, Palmer; Alli Lythgoe, Set Free Alaska, Matsu Valley; Steve Ray, Set Free Alaska, Wasilla; Linda Hendrickson, Set Free Alaska, Wasilla; Ric Nelson, Arc of Anchorage, Anchorage; Ryan Ray, Set Free Alaska, Palmer; Katie Rooks, Self, Prince of Wales; Adam Cardwell, Self, Willow; Abbe Hensley, Best Beginnings, Anchorage; Robin Minard, Matsu Health Foundation, Wasilla; Roger Branson, Self, Eagle River; Willy Keppel, Self, Quinhagak; Bert Houghtaling, Self, Big Lake; Gary McDonald, Self, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

SB 49 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET/LOANS/FUNDS

SB 49 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 50 APPROP: CAP; REAPPROP; SUPP; AMEND

SB 50 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 51 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

SB 51 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb49

#sb50

#sb51

SENATE BILL NO. 49

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making reappropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making appropriations under art. IX, sec. 17(c), Constitution of the State of Alaska, from the constitutional budget reserve fund; and providing for an effective date."

SENATE BILL NO. 50

"An Act making appropriations, including capital appropriations, reappropriations, and other appropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making appropriations to capitalize funds; and providing for an effective date."

SENATE BILL NO. 51

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and capital expenses of the state's integrated comprehensive mental health program; making supplemental appropriations; and providing for an effective date."

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^PUBLIC TESTIMONY: KENAI PENINSULA, ANCHORAGE, AND
MATANUSKA VALLEY

[1:02:33 PM](#)

CRIS EICHENLAUB, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), spoke in support of the statutory formula for the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). felt that the current budget issues were due to mismanagement of resources. He felt that there needed to be a repeal of former legislation, SB 26. He stated that the PFD should be taken out of the legislators' purview. He felt that the people should be given the authority to determine who should receive the money from the PFD.

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MARY JO TORGESON, ALASKA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AND ALASKA LIBRARY NETWORK, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the Alaska State Libraries. She understood that it was a challenging time, but the money would be used for the Alaska Library Catalog, which was a consortium of 90 percent of the public libraries in the state. She stressed that it was a very large database, and the budget amount was in the previous year's budget, but the governor had vetoed that funding.

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PHILIP LICHT, SET FREE ALASKA, WASILLA (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Recidivism, Reduction, and Recovery Project. He stated that request had been submitted to the capital budget. He thanked the committee for their previous years' support. He noted that the goal of the program was to develop a pilot that would work toward reducing new crimes and recidivism, and help people to get sober and improve their quality of life.

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SHANNON DAVENPORT, ALASKA NURSING ASSOCIATION, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of increased funding in the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA). She spoke to some issues related to the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API). She talked about continuity of care, as it related to patients returning to the community

and the limited resources available. She felt that the budget needed greater funding for those in the mental health community. She echoed similar concerns of Mr. Licht.

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MICHELLE REIMAN, SET FREE ALASKA, WASILLA (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Recidivism, Reduction, and Recovery Project. She shared that she had dealt with addiction and had worked with people in recovery. She stressed that stable housing was essential for sobriety and reducing recidivism.

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JENNI POLLARD, THREAD, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for early childhood education. She stated that the proposed budget included funding for early childhood resources and benefits. She felt that every dollar invested in children helped them to prepare for life and school. She urged the committee to designate additional resources toward early childhood programs and support.

Senator von Imhof noted that there were funds for early education in the budget.

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SUZY PEARSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ABUSED WOMEN AID CRISIS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault; Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)'s Homeless Assistance Program; and Empowering Choices Program. She felt that the programs helped victims move from shelters to permanent housing.

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GREGORY HEATH, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Recidivism, Reduction, and Recovery Project. He shared that he was a judge, and had adjudicated thousands of criminal probation and child in of aid need cases. He stated that in the majority of criminal cases the lack of available substance abuse treatment and safe, sober, and supervised housing were keys to rehabilitation for formerly incarcerated individuals. He

stated that most of the barriers were addressed by the project.

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ALLI LYTHGOE, SET FREE ALASKA, MATSU VALLEY (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Recidivism, Reduction, and Recovery Project. She felt that there was great benefit and success to a recovery project in the state. She stressed that she had worked directly with a multi-disciplinary recovery focused team. She pointed out that the needs stretched far beyond treatment, and required establishing solid roots in the community.

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STEVE RAY, SET FREE ALASKA, WASILLA (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Recidivism, Reduction, and Recovery Project. He shared that he had spent time in residential recovery, and had worked with inmates in prison. He stated that he had seen the need for men who immediately return to their previous situations after prison, and either reoffend or abuse substances. He felt that the program would help those leaving incarceration to be a part of the community and their families.

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LINDA HENDRICKSON, SET FREE ALASKA, WASILLA (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Recidivism, Reduction, and Recovery Project. She remarked that it was apparent that the need for recovery services were great and substantial. She noted the need for certified peer support, intensive case management, supportive housing, access to treatment in the prison system, outpatient services, school counseling for children, and inpatient service.

1:26:21 PM

RIC NELSON, ARC OF ANCHORAGE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), (spoke with an interpreter) spoke in support of funding for the sprinkler system for the Arc of Anchorage, which assists individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities as well as behavioral health. He

requested \$150,000 for two of the behavioral health homes. He also requested \$330,000 for non-behavioral health homes, or \$30,000 for each of the eleven homes. The City of Anchorage recently released a mandate, which said that all group and assisted living homes must have sprinkler systems installed with more than three individuals in each home.

Senator von Imhof stated that Co-Chair Bishop would look at that issue in the budget.

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RYAN RAY, SET FREE ALASKA, PALMER (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Recidivism, Reduction, and Recovery Project. He stressed that the mass incarceration of individuals with addiction disorders was devastating for public health and safety. He stressed that the challenge was especially evident in Alaska, because over 80 percent of Alaska's incarcerated population reported an addiction disorder. He pointed out that upon release from incarceration, those individuals were more than 129 times more likely to die of a drug overdose, and of those who are not deceased, 83 percent were likely to be arrested again in their lifetime.

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KATIE ROOKS, SELF, PRINCE OF WALES (via teleconference), spoke in support of the proposed gasoline tax. She also spoke against an income tax. She supported measures to reduce certain state spending and measures designed to encourage and support diverse forms of state revenue.

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ADAM CARDWELL, SELF, WILLOW (via teleconference), spoke against the use of money set aside for the PFD for government and Native Corporations. He stressed that Alaskans needed the PFD money to pay for things like heating fuel and other necessities.

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ABBE HENSLEY, BEST BEGINNINGS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), echoed statements from Ms. Pollard. She testified in support of funding for early childhood education, and Best Beginnings. She shared many positive

impacts of Best Beginnings Imagination Library. She remarked that there was a recent study of the Imagination Library in the state, and the results were extremely positive.

[1:39:26 PM](#)

ROBIN MINARD, MATSU HEALTH FOUNDATION, WASILLA (via teleconference), testified against the proposed cuts to Medicaid. She stressed that the cuts would have negative impacts on Matsu residents. She remarked that Medicaid was vital to keeping Alaskans healthy and working, because it provide access to many different health services to serve as a path to self-sufficiency.

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AT EASE

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RECONVENED

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ROGER BRANSON, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), testified in support of funding to assist the homeless and funding for substance abuse recovery. He spoke against transferring the AMHTA funds. He recalled the court case to establish the AMHTA. He spoke against the reopening of the settlement.

[2:01:27 PM](#)

WILLY KEPPEL, SELF, QUINHAGAK (via teleconference), spoke in concern about the current budget deficit. He felt that the budget should focus on the debt. He testified in support of funding backpay for the PFD. He stressed that Alaskans were in need of the money because there had been great economic damage to the people of the state.

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AT EASE

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RECONVENED

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BERT HOUGHTALING, SELF, BIG LAKE (via teleconference), testified against the use of the PFD to fund state government. He felt that the budget should align with current state revenue. He stressed that Alaskans needed a full PFD to support those that had been devastated by the pandemic.

[2:22:20 PM](#)

GARY MCDONALD, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), echoed the comments of Mr. Keppel and Mr. Haoughtaling. He spoke in support of audits of many programs, and spoke against funding for nonprofits.

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AT EASE

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RECONVENED

Co-Chair Stedman discussed the following day's schedule.

SB 49 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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SB 51 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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ADJOURNMENT

[2:37:27 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 2:37 p.m.